

The Thirties

ingredients, and pronounced both palatable and satisfying by Lord Horder and others who partook of them. If it had been possible to make a meal of Nutrition, many who went hungry would have been fed; but, alas, Nutrition allayed no hunger, except for self-importance and self-righteousness.

'tffaut mobiliser nos credits? French Cabinet Ministers used often to say in the days when reparations seemed payable, and before it became necessary to *mobiliser nos soldats* in the same way—*il faut documenter noire chaos*. Some put in a thumb and pulled out a plum; others attacked the whole dish, hoping to deduce from its total constituents the recipe according to which it had been compounded. This was the procedure of Mass Observation, described by one of its originators, Mr. Tom Harrisson, as 'the science of ourselves'. Teams of observers, on field-work bent, were entrusted with the task of collecting data regarding the habits, opinions, attitude of mind, and other characteristics of different sections of the population. They penetrated into saloon bars, lounged at street corners, rode in public vehicles, attended religious services and political and other meetings, questioning and observing; and the results of their researches were classified and arranged, conclusions being drawn therefrom. All-in-wrestling, for instance, was submitted to intensive Mass Observation²⁸ ('Observer asks his neighbour how he enjoyed it. "I can't tell you proper—I can't believe my own bloody eyes."'). 'Sample questioning' indicated that 'every class of trade was represented, including a police-sergeant, a coroner's officer and a priest/ and Observer failed to detect 'anything

specially cruel
or rough in the faces of the audience.' To check
this impression
of normality, Observer circulated a request to
arrange ten given
items in order of preference as conducive of
human happiness,
and was gratified to learn from the result that 'the
wrestling-fans
don't differ in any way from a wide sample of
other males' who
had been subjected to a similar experiment. The
fact that they
also put Knowledge first, Politics last, and Beauty
next to last

²⁸ See *Britain* by Mass Observation (arranged and
written by Charles
Madge and Tom Hamsson).